



Country Lecture on

Russia in Modern International Policy

P R O C E E D I N G S

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Organised by



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Proceedings of the Lecture on Russia in Modern International Policy

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a lecture on “Russia in Modern International Policy” on 30 March 2014 at BIISS Auditorium, Dhaka. Mr Alexander A. Nikolaev, Ambassador, Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bangladesh was the keynote presenter. Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc, Director General of BIISS, delivered the Address of Welcome. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors of BIISS concluded the session with his closing remarks.

Opening Address

In his Opening Address, **Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, ndu, psc**, Director General, BIISS, said that Russia is always a key player in major international affairs. Recently, Russia seized the world’s attention with its proposal to put Syrian Chemical weapons under international control. Besides, the UN-backed Geneva conference is an attempt by Russia and the United States to bring stakeholders to the table in order to reach a consensus on how to settle the civil war in Syria. Russia’s bold geopolitical moves towards Iran and Syria issues in 2013 and Crimea in 2014 shows Russia’s growing global influence in the Middle-East and beyond. Russia is also a leading force in world energy sector and a major participant in international energy market as it holds the world’s largest proven reserves of natural gas.

Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed noted that Bangladesh’s relations with Russia have strong historical roots. During the Liberation War in 1971, the leaders of the former USSR played extraordinary supportive role, particularly at the UN Security Council. Immediately after the Liberation War, the Soviet Union extended its helping hand to the Bangladeshi people and assisted the newly-born war-torn state in the reestablishment and development of its economy. He added that, recently relations between the two countries are gaining impetus in many spheres such as exploration of prospects for cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear energy, further promotion of bilateral trade and cultural ties. Bangladesh signed its biggest defence deal with Russia worth US\$ 1 billion, including US\$500 million for the country’s first nuclear power plant. He emphasised that Bangladesh and Russia need to explore every opportunity to work together to guarantee potential enhancement of these close relations for the sake of progress and prosperity of the common people.

Major General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed expressed his gratitude to the distinguished and learned audience for their presence. He thanked Mr Alexander A. Nikolaev, Ambassador, Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bangladesh, for his keynote address. He also expressed his deep gratitude to the distinguished personalities, scholars, session moderators, and discussants for participating in the seminar.

Keynote Lecture

Mr. Alexander A. Nikolaev, in his keynote address, said that the modern world is going through fundamental and dynamic changes that profoundly affect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens. In this context, its foreign policy becomes one of the major instruments of steady national development and of ensuring its competitiveness in a rapidly changing world. It has become obvious that traditional military and political alliances can no longer provide for counteracting the whole range of modern challenges and threats such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime, spread of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, climate change etc. These threats are transnational in their nature.

The Ambassador said that bloc approaches to international problems are being replaced by a network diplomacy based on flexible forms of participation in international structures for the search of joint solutions to common tasks. Economic, scientific and technological, environmental, demographic and informational factors are coming to the fore as important instalments of influence. Economic interdependence of states increasingly serves the interests of international stability. The reaction of the Western countries to the imminent loss of their superiority in global affairs finds its expression, in particular, in the political and psychological policy of "containing" emerging economies. He added that, for that purpose the West often resorts to the use of double standards and selective approach to various international issues. The unilateral action strategy provokes tensions and arms race, exacerbates interstate differences, stirs up ethnic and religious strife, and endangers security of other states. Coercive measures with the use of military force hi circumvention of the UN Charter and Security Council undermine basic principles of international law.

Discussing on the impact of globalisation, the Ambassador pointed out that the globalisation process confronts the increasing desire of individual states to protect their economic sovereignty. The cultural identity of the overwhelming majority of countries and peoples also suffers the increasing onslaught of globalisation. The Ambassador also identified another important trend that is the strengthening of a polycentric world order. Enhanced economic potential of the emerging global growth centers is a result of a more equal distribution of development resources due to liberalisation of global markets. The economic growth in some countries and regions converts into their political influence. After discussing the above background, he emphasised that

it is vitally important for Russia to strengthen its statehood, to achieve stable economic growth, to resolve social problems, to overcome the resource-based model of economy and to encourage its transition to innovations, to improve demographic situation and to strengthen civil society institutes. Russia pursues, as the Ambassador considered, an open, predictable and pragmatic foreign policy determined by its national interests. The country develops cooperation with foreign partners on the basis of equality, mutual respect for interests and mutual benefit. Balanced character of Russia's foreign policy is its distinguishing feature. The country's national interests today make it imperative to actively promote positive agenda covering the whole spectrum of international problems.

Ambassador Mr. Nikolaev stressed on how Russia attaches great importance to improving the manageability of the world development and to establishing a self-regulating international system. So Russia, he elaborated, wants to make itself more involved in such formats as the Group of 20, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation etc. Russia consistently calls for diminished role of the force factor in international relations with simultaneous enhancement of strategic and regional stability. With this aim in view Russia fulfils its international obligations in the spheres of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, arms control and disarmament, as well as takes confidence-building measures in military sphere on the basis of the principles of equality and indivisibility of security. Russia favours political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts on the basis of collective actions of the international community, because modern conflicts cannot be solved by the use of force. Their settlement should be sought through dialogue and negotiations of all parties rather than through isolation of any of them. Russia regards international peacemaking as an effective instrument for settling armed conflicts and resolving post-crisis nation building tasks and intends to participate, whenever it deems necessary, in international peacemaking activities under the auspices of the United Nations.

Noting Russia's policies with regard to terrorism and environmental security, the Ambassador mentioned that Russia, in accordance with international law, takes all necessary measures to repel and prevent terrorist attacks against itself and its citizens, to protect them against terrorist acts, prohibit activities within its territory aimed at organising such acts against citizens or interests of other countries. The Russian Federation stands for expanding international cooperation in order to ensure environmental security and to counter climate changes on the planet, including through the use of brand-new energy-saving and resource-saving technologies. Among priorities in this sphere are further development of science-based approaches to the preservation of the healthy natural environment and increased interaction with all the states of the world in the area of environmental protection with a view to ensuring sustainable development.

The Ambassador proclaimed Russia's commitment to universal democratic values, including protection of human rights. In this sensitive sphere, it is highly important to prevent hypocrisy and double standards, to respect national and historic peculiarities of each state and to avoid forced imposition of borrowed value systems on anyone interlay Russia itself or Bangladesh or any other nations. The main objective of the Russian foreign policy on the European track is to create a truly open, democratic system of regional collective security and cooperation in such a way as not to allow its new fragmentation and reproduction of bloc-based approaches which still persist in the European architecture that took shape during the Cold War period. Russia builds its relations with the USA taking into account not only the vast potential of that country for mutually advantageous bilateral trade, economic, scientific, technological and other cooperation, but also its key influence on the state of global strategic stability and international situation in general.

The lecture also focused on how Russia sees the importance of bilateral ties for promoting economic interaction and cooperation in international spheres. The development of friendly relations with China and India forms an important track of Russia's foreign policy in Asia. Russia builds up its strategic partnership with China in all fields on the basis of common fundamental approaches to key issues on international agenda. The Ambassador stated that, bringing the scope and quality of economic interaction in line with the high level of political relations constitutes a major task in the field of bilateral ties. While deepening strategic partnership with India, Russia keeps by its line aimed at strengthening interaction on topical international issues and comprehensive strengthening of the mutually advantageous bilateral ties on all fronts, particularly in ensuring a substantial growth in the trade and economic sphere. In the list of foreign policy priorities of Russia the People's Republic of Bangladesh holds an important place as well. The two countries started to develop friendly and mutually beneficial ties in the early 70s, from the very first days of Bangladesh as an independent state. The people of the Soviet Union at that time raised their voice against the atrocities committed against the people of Bangladesh by the then military administration. That was not simply a political decision but the manifestation of deep and sincere sentiments of the Soviet people who were always supportive of national liberation movements all over the world.

Talking about Russian assistance for war-ravaged Bangladesh, he mentioned that immediately after the Liberation War Russia extended its political support to Bangladesh in order to facilitate its admission to the UN. Russia also assisted the newly-born state to restore and develop its war-ravaged economy. Co-operation between Russia and Bangladesh has always been comprehensive as it covers a wide range of spheres from politics to culture. Russia and Bangladesh share common approach to ideas of multi-polar global architecture and fair international economic system. These basic postulates were reconfirmed on numerous occasions, for example, during the talks between H.E. Mr. Sergei Lavrov Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, and his Bangladeshi counterpart H.E. Dr. Dipu Moni in Brunei on 1 July 2013 on the

sidelines of ASEAN Regional Forum. Russia appreciates the constructive foreign policy of Bangladesh that is aimed at deeper integration and connectivity in South Asia, as well as at solution of all the problems of the sub-continent in the spirit of good neighbourhood and solidarity. They support the interest of Bangladesh to collaborate with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

On the economic relations between Russia and Bangladesh, he said that Bangladesh and Russia have yielded remarkable results in their bilateral trade and commerce. Russia contributed substantially to the construction of thermal power plants in Bangladesh. The power plants of Siddhirganj and Ghorasal commissioned in the mid-70th still produce about 1/5 of total power output in Bangladesh. Last year 1 Russian company "Technoproniexport" completed modernisation of the 2nd unit of Ghorasal thermal power plant. It will be formally commissioned after a trial period, though it already works almost in full-swing. The same company and few others are ready to take part in tenders for modernisation of other units of Ghorasal TPP. Russian company GAZPROM is involved in development of natural gas resources in Bangladesh. In 2012 its subsidiary company GAZPROM International concluded two contracts with Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (BAPEX), Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Ltd. (BGFCL) and Sylhet Gas Fields Ltd. (SGFL). The Russian company undertook of drilling 10 production wells: four at the Titas field, one each at the Rashidpur, Shrikail, Semutang and Begumganj fields and two at Shahbazpur field. Despite all the hartals in 2013, that were major obstacles for carrying on the drilling work, the wells of Shrikail-3, Begumganj-3, Titas-20 and Titas-21 have already been completed. The output of natural gas in Bangladesh increased by approximately 30 million cubic feet a day. Strategic decision to construct the Rooppur nuclear power plant has already been taken by the governments of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Russian Federation. During the historic visit of H.E. Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Moscow in January 2013 an intergovernmental agreement on the Russian state loan for this purpose was signed. Russian experts will participate in construction of the Rooppur NPP. When commissioned, it will add 2000 MW to the national grid.

The Ambassador informed the audience that in 2012 and 2013 turnover of bilateral trade surpassed the level of US \$ 700 million. Nevertheless, two countries have all the potential to increase the trade volume rapidly up to US \$ 1 billion. The experience of more than four decades proves that there is nothing impossible in the field of the economic cooperation between the two nations; He meant the appropriate commercial contracts, two-sides or multilateral industrial joint ventures, etc. Everything is possible! Offshore exploration and extraction, different types of joint ventures, collaboration in LNG and compressed gas etc, everything is possible in future as bilateral relations will only be strengthened in the years ahead.

In the second part of his lecture, the Russian Ambassador elaborated the Russian position with regard to ongoing Crimean crisis. He informed the audience that more than 82 percent of the electorate took part in the vote. Over 96 percent of them spoke out in favour of reuniting with Russia. These numbers speak for themselves. To understand the reason behind such a choice, it is enough to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other. Everything in Crimea speaks of the shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is a unique blend of different peoples’ cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries. Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and people of other ethnic groups have lived side by side in Crimea, retaining their own identity, traditions, languages and faith.

He noted that incidentally, the total population of the Crimean Peninsula today is 2.2 million people, of whom almost 1.5 million are Russians, 350,000 are Ukrainians who predominantly consider Russian their native language, and about 290,000-300,000 are Crimean Tatars, who, as the referendum has shown, also lean towards Russia. In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes Russia went through during the entire 20th century. After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons, added large sections of the historical south of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine.

Assessing the historical events that led to handover of Crimea to Ukraine, the Ambassador said that the decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes. Naturally, in a totalitarian state nobody bothered to ask the citizens of Crimea and Sevastopol. They were faced with the fact. People, of course, wondered why - all of a sudden - Crimea became part of Ukraine. But on the whole this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state – USSR then. Back then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states. However, this has happened. Unfortunately, what seemed impossible became a reality. The USSR fell apart. Things developed so swiftly that few people realised how truly dramatic those events and their consequences would be. It was only

when Crimea ended up as part of a different country that Russia realised that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered.

Depicting his observations gathered during his tenure as Russian Consul General in Crimea, he noted that, ten years later, when he served in Crimea from 2003-2008, he heard every day the Crimean residents saying that back in 1991 they were handed over like a sack of potatoes. This is hard to disagree with. And what about the Russian state? What about Russia? Then it humbly accepted the situation. Russia was going through such hard times then, that realistically it was incapable of protecting its interests. Time and time again attempts were made to deprive the Russians of Ukraine their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimilation. Moreover, the Russians, just as other citizens of Ukraine were suffering from the constant political and state crisis that has been rocking the country for over 20 years.

The Ambassador elaborated the reasons why Ukrainian people wanted changes. They have had enough of the authorities in power during the years of Ukraine's independence. Presidents, prime ministers and parliamentarians changed, but their attitude to the country and its people remained the same. They milked the country, fought among themselves for power, assets and cash flows and did not care much about the ordinary people. They did not wonder why it was that millions of Ukrainian citizens saw no prospects at home and went to other countries to work as day labourers. He stressed this: it was not some Silicon Valley they fled to, but to become day labourers. Last year alone almost 3 million people found such jobs in Russia. According to some sources, in 2013 their earnings in Russia totalled over \$20 billion, which is about 12 percent of Ukraine's GDP. He also said that he understands those who came out on Maidan with peaceful slogans against corruption, inefficient state management and poverty. The right to peaceful protest, democratic procedures and elections exist for the sole purpose of replacing the authorities that do not satisfy the people. However, those who stood behind the latest events in Ukraine had a different agenda: they were preparing yet another government takeover; they wanted to seize power and would stop short of nothing. They resorted to terror, murder and riots. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day. The new so-called authorities began by introducing a draft law to revise the language policy, which was a direct infringement on the rights of ethnic minorities including Russians, Crimean Tartars and other nations living in Ukraine.

Describing the current situation in Ukraine, Mr. Alexander A. Nikolaev emphasised that it is obvious that there is no legitimate executive authority in Ukraine now, nobody to talk to. Many government agencies have been taken over by the impostors, but they do not have any control in the country, while they themselves are often controlled by radicals and neo-Nazi. In some cases, you need a special permit from the militants on Maidan to meet with certain ministers of the current government. Those who opposed the coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the

residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities. However, the people could not reconcile themselves to this outrageous historical injustice. All these 23 years, citizens and many public figures came back to this issue, saying that Crimea is historically Russian land and Sevastopol is a Russian city. Everyone knew this in their hearts and minds, but during all 23 years they had to proceed from the existing reality and build Russian good-neighbourly relations with independent Ukraine on a new basis. However, this is not how the situation developed.

The lecture also tried to establish that it was natural for Russia not to leave this plea unheeded; Russia could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on its part. First, the country had to help create conditions so that the residents of Crimea for the first time in history were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future. However, what do they hear from their colleagues in Western Europe and North America? They say Russia is violating norms of international law. Firstly, it's a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law – better late than never. Secondly, and most importantly – what exactly is the country violating? True, the President of the Russian Federation received permission from the Upper House of Parliament to use the Armed Forces in Ukraine. However, strictly speaking, nobody has acted on this permission yet. Russia's Armed Forces never entered Crimea. As Crimea declared its independence and decided to hold a referendum, the Supreme Council of Crimea referred to the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination.

The Ambassador reminded that when Ukraine seceded from the USSR it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word. Ukraine used this right, yet the residents of Crimea are denied it. Why is that? Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent their western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities. This event is not a single or unique one in the recent history of self-determination – there are South Sudan (2011), East Timor (2002) and Bangladesh (1971) as well. By the way, pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN International Court agreed with this approach and made the following comment recently, and he quoted: “No general prohibition may be inferred from the practice of the Security Council with regard to declarations of independence,” and “General international law contains no prohibition on declarations of independence.” Crystal clear, as they say.

He offered a second quote from another official document: the Written Statement of the United States of America dated April 17, 2009, submitted to the same UN International Court in connection with the hearings on Kosovo. Again, he quoted: “Declarations of independence may,

and often do, violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law.”. They wrote this, disseminated it all over the world, had everyone agree and now they are outraged. Over what? The actions of Crimean people completely fit in with these instructions, as it were. For some reason, things that Kosovo Albanians were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed. Again, one wonders why. They keep hearing from the United States and Western Europe that Kosovo is some special case. What makes it so special in the eyes of their colleagues? It turns out that it is the fact that the conflict in Kosovo resulted in so many human casualties. Is this a legal argument? The ruling of the International Court says nothing about this. This is not even double standards; this is amazing, primitive, blunt cynicism. One should not try so crudely to make everything suit their interests, calling the same thing white today and black tomorrow.

The Ambassador also mentioned that if the Crimean local self-defence units had not taken the situation under control, there could have been casualties as well. Fortunately this did not happen. There was not a single armed confrontation in Crimea and no casualties. Why do you think this was so? The answer is simple: because it is very difficult, practically impossible to fight against the will of the people. Other thoughts come to mind in this connection. They keep talking of some Russian intervention in Crimea, some sort of aggression. This is strange to hear. He could not recall a single case in history of an intervention without a single shot being fired and with no human casualties.

Considering Ukraine as an example of what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades, Mr. Alexander A. Nikolaev said that, after the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, no longer there is stability. Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Their western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle “If you are not with us, you are against us.” To make this aggression look legitimate, they force the necessary resolutions from international organisations, and if for some reason this does not work, they simply ignore the UN Security Council and the UN overall.

The Russian Ambassador brought several examples in support of his claims. He mentioned the case of Yugoslavia; he remembered 1999 very well because in 1998-1999 he was as the OSCE Verification Mission in Kosovo. And then, they hit Afghanistan, Iraq, and frankly violated the UN Security Council resolution on Libya, when instead of imposing the so-called no-fly zone over it they started bombing it too. There was a whole series of controlled “colour” revolutions. Clearly, the people in those nations, where these events took place, were sick of tyranny and

poverty, of their lack of prospects; but these feelings were taken advantage of cynically. Standards were imposed on these nations that did not in any way correspond to Western way of life, traditions, cultures or religions. As a result, instead of democracy and freedom, there was chaos, outbreaks in violence and a series of upheavals. The Arab Spring turned into the Arab Winter. A similar situation unfolded in Ukraine. In 2004, to push the necessary candidate through at the presidential elections, they thought up some sort of third round that was not stipulated by the law. It was absurd and a mockery of the constitution. And now, they have thrown in an organised and well-equipped army of militants.

Considering all the actions by the West against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration, the Ambassador said that Russia strived to engage in dialogue with the West. It is constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; it wants to strengthen the level of trust and for relations to be equal, open and fair. But there are no reciprocal steps. On the contrary, they have lied many times, made decisions behind the backs, and placed the world before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at Russian borders. They kept telling Russia the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you." That's easy to say. It happened with the deployment of a missile defence system. In spite of all the apprehensions, the project is working and moving forward. It happened with the endless foot-dragging in the talks on visa issues, promises of fair competition and free access to global markets.

In the lecture, it was also pointed that Russia was being threatened with sanctions. But the country already experienced many limitations, ones that are quite significant for the economy and the nation. For example, still during the times of the Cold War, the US and subsequently other nations restricted a large list of technologies and equipment from being sold to the USSR, creating the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls list. Today, they have formally been eliminated, but only formally; and in reality, many limitations are still in effect. They are constantly trying to sweep Russia into a corner because now, 23 years after the dissolution of USSR, Russia obtains an independent position, because it maintains this and because it calls things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions. Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard. They must always remember this. Today, it is imperative to end this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries. It has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.

Appreciating all the nations who understood Russian actions in Crimea, Mr. Alexander A. Nikolaev heartfully thanked the 11 fraternal nations who voted in its favour at the UN General Assembly session on March 28. The country is not less grateful to the people of China, whose leaders have always considered the situation in Ukraine and Crimea taking into account the full historical and political context. Russia greatly appreciate India, Brazil, South Africa and other countries' reserve and objectivity while considering this drafted by the West resolution of the General Assembly. In capacity of the Ambassador of Russia to Bangladesh, he was very enthusiastic about position of Dhaka delegation to UN who abstained this anti-Russian voting as well as other nation's delegations who two days ago didn't participate in casting their voice at all.

He assured that Russia does not want to harm Ukraine in any way, or to hurt Ukrainians national feelings. It has always respected the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state. Unlike this unconstitutional government and neo-Nazi inherits with all their supporters and advisors from abroad, who sacrificed Ukraine's unity for their political ambitions. They flaunt slogans about Ukraine's greatness, but they are the ones who did everything to divide the nation. Today's civil standoff is entirely on their conscience. He requested not to believe those who are shouting that other regions will follow Crimea. Russia does not want to divide Ukraine. As for Crimea, it was and remains a Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean-Tatar land. Just as it has been for centuries - Crimea will be a home to all the peoples living there. What it will never be and do - is follow in neo-Nazi's footsteps. Crimea is its common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian. Otherwise the Russians and the Ukrainians could lose Crimea completely, and that could happen in the near historical perspective. Please think about it.

The Russian Ambassador noted that they have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. These are things that could have become reality were it not for the choice the Crimean people made. Fortunately such a choice was made and Russia respect and recognise this choice. Historical logic and truth are re-established in complete accordance with the people's will and international law guaranteed by the UN Charter. Definitely! Russia is not opposed to cooperation with NATO, for this is certainly not the case. For all the internal processes within the organisation, NATO remains a military alliance and Russia is against having a military alliance making itself at home right in its backyard or historic territory. He simply could not imagine that Russians would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit Russia, be its guests, rather than the other way round.

Sharing his pains to see what is happening in the Ukrainian continental territory at the moment, he said that it is unbearable to withstand the people's suffering and their uncertainty about how to get through today and what awaits them tomorrow. These concerns are understandable because they are not simply close neighbours but they are one people. Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities. Ancient Russian is the common source and they cannot live without each other. Millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means. But it should be above all in Ukraine's own interest to ensure that these people's rights and interests are fully protected. This is the guarantee of Ukraine's state stability and territorial integrity.

Mr. Alexander A. Nikolaev, at the end of his lecture, assures that Russia wants to be friends with Ukraine and it wants Ukraine to be a strong, sovereign and self-sufficient country. Ukraine is one of our biggest partners after all. Both countries have many joint projects and he believes in their success no matter what the current difficulties. Most importantly, Russia wants peace and harmony to reign in Ukraine, and it is ready to work together with other countries to do everything possible to facilitate and support this. But only Ukraine's own people can put their own house in order.

Question-Answer Session

Ambassador (retd) Shamim Ahmed, Director, Center for Foreign Affairs Studies, thanked BISS for organising the country lecture on Russia. He also expressed thanks to the Russian Ambassador for offering a comprehensive presentation. His question was about Russia's policy in Syria. He asked the Ambassador how he would explain his country's policy towards Syria particularly in the context of its national interests.

Response: Replying to Ambassador Shamim's question, the Russian Ambassador said that Russia's policy in Syria is very simple. Despite all the accusations particularly on Russia's policy towards this certain Middle Eastern country, he made it clear that Russia is not supporting unilaterally any side of the conflict in Syria, neither the separatists and the liberation army, nor the government of President Bashar Al Asad. But Russia strongly maintains that the destiny of the Syrian nation must be determined by the Syrian people themselves without any outside interference. He said that he was not hinting anything, but directly declared that in the name of so called liberation, there are now thousands of foreign militants and mercenaries fighting in Syria and they are not necessarily from other Muslim regions of the world. He admitted that there are also few Russians in Syria. He said that the opposition is deeply divided and there is an inter-religious conflict going on; Allawites against Sunnis, Sunnis against Shias and Shia-Sunni against Christians. The Ambassador mentioned that he visited Syria on a short mission ten years back and during that time he found absolute religious tolerance in that country; the population was the same and the major religious divisions were also the same. He said that he could never imagine anywhere in the world inside the huge and

most ancient Mosque, the Mosque of Saladin, there was a Christian Chappel. People were living in harmony and tolerance. But now it is completely different.

Mr. Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, former Commerce Secretary, congratulated the Russian Ambassador for his excellent and elaborate presentation. He basically touched upon the trade and economic relations between Bangladesh and Russia. Referring to Ambassador's speech, he mentioned that Russia has been helping to modernise and upgrade one of the power generation units in Ghorashal power plant. His question was that though Russian has built for long number of years several power units in Ghorashal and Sidirganj, why only one has been modernised so far. Bangladesh is in severe energy crisis. During the last five or six years, more units could have been modernized. What was the real problem in not doing this?

The second question he asked was on the trade volume between Russia and Bangladesh. Referring to the Ambassador's speech, he noted that the bilateral trade between the two countries is US\$700 million. Compared to Bangladesh's economy and the Russian economy and the potential, it could reach US\$1.5 to 2 billion in the next five years. He said that apparently Russia's reluctance to give tariff concession to Bangladesh's exports to Russia is perhaps the major hindrance. Bangladesh asked for trade preference more than a decade ago in 2001. He asked whether the Ambassador sees any progress in that particular direction.

Response: Regarding trade and economic relations and replying to the question on why only one block was modernised, he said that either he confused or did not mention about the issue of modernisation entirely in his presentation. He clarified that Russia has modernised two of the six blocks of Ghorashal power plant. And if the government invites tenders, then few Russian companies will probably participate in modernising other blocks as well. He did not want to make any hysteria on that matter. He also stressed that since the blocks were running non-stop for almost three decades without any services or maintenances, it would be more profitable to construct new ones, rather than renovating the old ones.

Replying to the question on trade volume, the Ambassador agreed with Mr. Chowdhury that there is a huge potential of trade between the two countries and compared with the size of the economies and potential, the current volume, whether 700 billion or 1 billion dollars or more, is nothing. He assured that his embassy is working on that. He identified that the problem lies in the fact that Bangladesh exporters are too traditional and not curious to explore new opportunities. Sometimes they act in a somehow strange way. He urged that the embassy is not a trade promotion bureau and therefore the exporters should not bother it with strange questions. He also pointed out that bureaucracy in both countries is another obstacle to the growth of trade. He said that it took him two months of connecting the finance ministers of both countries in the initiative of financing the preliminary feasibility studies for Rooppur power plant. On the question of trade preference, the Ambassador said that Western countries are threatening Bangladesh to postpone the GSP facilities. He

emphasised that Russia does not have GSP in its relationship with Bangladesh, but the main problem of trade growth is that companies of both countries are operating under the condition of double UTO. Another big problem is that there is no direct banking relationship between Russia and Bangladesh and this is hampering the growth of trade.

Ambassador (retd) Humayun A. Kamal, thanked the Russian Ambassador for a comprehensive presentation on Russia in modern international policy, Crimea and Russia-Bangladesh relations. He mentioned that Bangladeshi people will always be grateful and indebted to the people of the then Soviet Union and later Russia for the moral, diplomatic and material support that they provided before, during and after the War of Liberation. The then Soviet Union and later Russia supported Bangladesh in many international organisations. After the independence, he noted, they provided assistance in two very vital sectors: the first one was the infrastructure particularly the clearing of mine from Chittagong, the only port of Bangladesh that time, which was very critical for the country. The mining operation cost the death of some Soviet sailors (Navies). The second area, he mentioned, was the Soviet Assistance in the power sector of Bangladesh. He requested the Ambassador, referring to the previously signed MOUs on bilateral cultural cooperation and sports, that there should be more cooperation in the cultural and sports sectors particularly in gymnastics and chess. Bangladesh does not have very good training facilities and expertise in gymnastics, while Russia is very renowned and expert in both the sports. He suggested that there should be training on gymnastics and chess in the schools and colleges which will enhance both the physical fitness and mental abilities of Bangladeshi boys and girls. And finally he pointed out that there is no direct air flight between Dhaka and Moscow and he urged the Ambassador to consider resuming direct air flight between Bangladesh and Russia.

Response: In reply to the questions on cultural cooperation and sports, he said that an MOU on the cultural cooperation was signed between two ministries of culture of the two countries one year ago during the visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. A few days ago, the Vice Head of the Russian Federal Agency for Cultural Exchanges (Rossotrudnichestvo) has visited Bangladesh; he has fruitful meetings with the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Information of Bangladesh and few other high officials regarding the possibilities of intensifying cultural cooperation. The Ambassador pointed out that there was deep cultural cooperation in 1970s, and after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 there has been a two-decade time break in cultural exchanges between the two countries. He identified that though in the early years of Bangladesh, there were translations of Russian books in Bengali language, but now there are no translations going on. He said that three decades have passed and there is no exchange of literature and books, neither Russian nor Bangladeshi. He mentioned that there are so many new magnificent writers, actors and musicians in Russia who are completely unknown to Bangladesh. He noted that it was possible to translate and publish classical literature of Russia in Bangladesh in millions of copies. Though now factors like author's intellectual properties and other things are affecting that possibility as both countries are market economies. He expressed hope that there is goodwill on both sides.

There are several very good clauses in the MOU signed last year and Russia is quite optimistic to conclude an inter-governmental agreement on cultural cooperation in the end of this year which has been proposed by the Minister of Culture of Bangladesh.

Addressing the question on sports cooperation, he said that his embassy is trying to convince one of the Russian world champions in chess to visit Bangladesh upon the invitation of Bangladesh Chess Federation. He mentioned that it will create much interest not only among the chess lovers and players but also among all the sports and intellectual elite of Bangladesh. About gymnastics, he informed the audience that famous Russian lady-gymnast, who was the world champion in 2013, is Bangladeshi by birth. So he hoped that both Russia and Bangladesh can work together in gymnastics as well.

On the question of direct flight between Dhaka and Moscow, he said that the direct flight between Dhaka and Moscow is not commercially viable for economic reasons: the number of people travelling from one country to the other is not very large. There has been a proposal to initiate Dhaka-Moscow flight via Middle East. As there are large numbers of flights from Dhaka to Middle East are offered by diverse countries' agencies, it will be very competitive to make Dhaka-Moscow flight via Middle East commercially successful. However, he is hopeful that when hundreds of Russian engineers and specialists will be visiting Bangladesh for the nuclear power plant project, Russia will think of establishing direct aero-flights between the two countries.

Dr. M. Enamul Huq, former Inspector General of Police, and Member, Law Commission, Bangladesh, appreciated the lecture presented by the Russian Ambassador, while noting the lecture as somewhat one-sided. He mentioned that he had the privilege to visit Russia more than once as a member of the executive committee of Interpol. He knows the topography of Crimea, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. He also mentioned that he has knowledge about the history of Crimean War 1854-1856, Treaty of Westphalia and other related episodes. He questioned the Ambassador's claim on Crimea as an inseparable part of Russia and his statement "better late than never". He said that the lecture was one-sided and there should have been a representation of the Ukrainian point of view on the issue of whether it was annexation or reunification.

Response: The Russian Ambassador appreciated Dr. Huq's knowledge of Russian geography and the history of Crimea and Russia. But he said that he would be strict to his previously used terminology that is, it is not an annexation rather reunification. He emphasised that he cannot imagine an annexation or aggression without a single shot firing and a single incident of killing. It was a reunification. He mentioned that during the time when he served as Consul General in Crimea, ordinary people of Crimea used to ask him during the visiting hours what for Russia left them to Ukraine despite they were all Russians. The Crimean people against their will had to accept Ukrainian passport or citizenship. It was both personal and professional shame for him that he had to remain silent and could not offer anything to the people's demand during that time.

Ambassador (retd) M. Shafiullah thanked the Russian Ambassador for his excellent presentation. His question was about Bangladesh's capability and expertise in handling Rooppur power plant. He asked that, after the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, what is the level of Bangladesh's expertise to handle a nuclear power plant. Secondly, he asked what the safeguard clauses are: who will be responsible for running the plant and who will take the responsibility if any accident or disaster takes place, as currently Bangladesh does not have know-how or expertise to either run the plant or to handle any nuclear accidents.

Response: Replying to the question on Rooppur plant, he said that the question is not a traditional one. He said that the most provocative question was asked by someone who has the least knowledge on elementary physics particularly nuclear physics. He mentioned that during his tenure as Ambassador in Bangladesh, he has attained a minimum knowledge on nuclear physics. He said that in fact after Fukushima disaster, without any magical matter or political advertisement, the acceptance of Russian nuclear power plant activities has rather increased, though there have been many speculations by its commercial competitors. He assured that the reactor designed for the Rooppur power plant is ten times safer than the Fukushima's reactor. He also mentioned that the reactor is a sustainable one. He condemned Bangladeshi newspapers' report on the technology as unsafe and that many of the former Soviet Republics and Warsaw Pact members refused to accept it which is a complete lie. Russia has been working to build more than 30 nuclear power plants of the same design including in its own territory, East European countries, China, Vietnam and so on.

He also said that Ambassador Shafiullah's comment reminded him about the German Ambassador's recent comment on Rooppur power plant. He noted that the German Ambassador opposed the construction of power plant in Bangladesh, but it is unknown what the reason behind this opposition was. He also informed the audience that two years ago Russia completed a huge nuclear power plant in Iran which was originally started by a German company Siemens 20 years ago and had to give up without significant progress.

Col Emdad Uddin Ahmed (retd), former Research Director, BISS, thanked the Russian Ambassador for his lecture and expressed gratitude to Russian people for their extraordinary support to Bangladesh during the war of liberation in 1971. He mentioned that there had been many changes and ups and downs in the 1980s and 1990s and the bipolar world ended with the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. With that, there was a rise of a unipolar world where United States became the sole leader. Col Emdad asked whether the present Russian government is going to accept the dominance of the United States.

Response: In response to the question whether Russia is going to accept the dominance of the United States, the Russian Ambassador said that he had already mentioned in his presentation that Russia respects the United States as a country and as a state. He noted that Russia is completely sure that one polar world is going away. He emphasised that Russia is in favour of neither a bipolar not a

unipolar world; rather it supports a policy of multipolar world. Any attempt to create a unipolar world by anybody, not only the US, is unacceptable for Russia.

Mr. M. Mokammel Haque, former Secretary, discussed his comment into two parts. In the first part, he said that after being informed about the title of the lecture, he thought that the Ambassador would be elaborating various aspects of Russian international policy, particularly towards the West, the United States, third world countries like Bangladesh and Far East and so on. He hoped that in future the Ambassador will provide some expositions in those areas. In the second part, he thanked the Russian President Putin. He said that when he started as a young officer, the world was bipolar and then in 1990 it graduated to a unipolar world to the disliking of many including him. He mentioned that now it is at least a 1.5 polar world where there is some indication that President Putin is trying to stand up against the huge leviathan, the United States. He said that this is beneficial for Bangladesh and he would love to hear more about it. He supported the rights of determination of Crimea, because on this principle, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, South Sudan, and East Timor have achieved their statehood, and Crimea should not be an exception.

Ambassador (ret'd) A. Momen Chowdhury made one observation and one question. He said that whether Russian action in Crimea is an annexation or reunification depends which side someone is talking from. It cannot be a policy of Russia in the modern world to possess, either annexed or reunified, a part of a sovereign state which is rejected by the international community as seen in the UN General Assembly. He said that all his life has gone standing in the middle of cold war and he does not want the resurgence of the same policy. Saying that people are benefitting from the globalised world, he emphasised, whether it is a bipolar world or a unipolar one, Bangladesh wants benefit from the global policies of all countries. He asked the Ambassador whether Russia is slowly flexing its muscle to return to cold war. The special interest of Russia in Crimea underlies the fact that most of the Crimean people speak Russian language. There are many republics got independence from the former Soviet Union where Russia has significant national interests as well. Will there be an extension of the same policy like Crimea to other areas? The other point he made was on Syria. Noting that he had been in Syria for a quite some time and has observed Bashar Al Asad's rise to power, he said, his heart bleeds when he sees that Syrian people are suffering in way nobody else has suffered in the modern world. He mentioned that if there would be no Russia to stand up for Syria, it could be in bigger trouble today. Claiming that Russia is apparently supporting the government of Asad, he supported Russia's firm position of not letting the militants and foreign fighters to wage war and kill thousands of people in that country is not an option.

Response: In response to the question on whether Russia is flexing its muscle, the Russian Ambassador replied that his country is not flexing its muscle. He said that this is an open and honest answer. Russia is only concentrating on its own national interests and now the country has enough capability to safeguard its interests.

Sheikh Shahrier Zaman, Reporter, Dhaka Tribune, said that last year Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited Russia and signed a 1 billion dollar arms deal. Noting a recently published report, he mentioned that Bangladesh is going to order 24 jet fighters from Russia under the previously signed arms deal. He asked the Ambassador how much money is spent on this particular order. The second question he asked was on Bangladesh's position on the issue of Crimea in the UN General Assembly.

Response: Replying to the question from the mass media representative of the Dhaka Tribune, the Ambassador said that the amount of the arms deal is hampering the mass media people's quiet sleeps. He mentioned that there was an intergovernmental agreement signed on 15 January regarding Russian state loan for purchasing military hardware for Bangladesh. He noted that both countries so far have taken appropriate measures to process the purchase of the military hardware including combat aircraft, fighter. Answering the question of what is price of each piece, he asked the media representative to direct his question to Bangladeshi air force.

Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Associate Professor of International Relations, National Defense University, Pakistan, said that she understands Russian position on Crimean issue after the excellent narrative offered by the Ambassador. She noted that Russia has been very proactive in dealing with many other issues and crises including Syrian conflict, Iran's nuclear issue and so on, cooperating with the USA and undertaking a policy dialogue and diplomacy. She asked how Crimean crisis is going to affect Russia-US and Russia-EU relations.

The Ambassador concluded the question answer session by thanking all the participants for pointing out valuable questions. He said that it helped him to understand and appreciate the public opinion of Bangladesh regarding Russia-Bangladesh bilateral relations in the emerging multipolar world. He thanked BIIS for organising the presentation and presented BIIS with book gifts to remind the commemoration of many years of bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Russia.

Concluding Remarks

During his concluding speech, **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad** said that Russia is the largest country in the world, covering more than one-eighth of the Earth's inhabited land area. Russia is also the world's ninth most populous nation with 143 million people as of 2012. The USSR became the largest and leading constituent of the Soviet Union, the world's first constitutionally socialist state and a recognised superpower, which played a decisive role in the Allied victory in World War II. He noted that the Soviet era saw some of the most significant technological achievements of the 20th century, including the world's first spacecraft, and the first man in space. He mentioned that the Russian economy ranks as the eighth largest by nominal GDP and sixth largest by purchasing power parity. Russia's extensive mineral and energy resources, the largest reserves in the world, have made it one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas

globally. The country is second largest of the five recognised nuclear weapons states and permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a member of the G20, the Council of possesses the largest stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. He also mentioned that Russia is the member of many powerful regional and international organisations and coalitions.

He added that Russia (then Soviet Union) rendered invaluable and unwavering support to the cause of Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971. This contributed immensely to the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country. Russia and Bangladesh started to develop friendly and mutually beneficial ties, from the very first days of Bangladesh as an independent state. Russia provided crucial assistance to the newly born state to restore and rebuild the war-ravaged economy of Bangladesh. Russia supplied a dozen MiG fighter aircrafts to the newly formed Bangladesh Air Force and their naval team of 200 personnel helped to clear mines at the Chittagong port quickly and efficiently, making it operational.

In March 1972, Father of the Nation, Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Moscow, which was his first formal overseas trip, to express the nation's appreciation for their role in liberation war. The Soviet Union also provided its support to Bangladesh in acquiring international recognition and joining the UN. Trade flourished between the two countries under mutually beneficial barter arrangements. The Soviet Union also helped us in building infrastructure, including power plants. They also provided large number of scholarships and training programme to help Bangladesh in human resources development. Unfortunately, relations between Bangladesh and Russia went into a quick-freeze after the assassination of Banga Bondhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, cooperation and interaction between the two countries continued at a relatively low level with occasional spurts of activity. He noted that the relations between the two countries received a new momentum since 2009. Major new cooperative projects were identified and embarked upon. The Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina visited Moscow from January, 2013. This visit has become an important new milestone in relations between the two countries. It was the first official visit at the top leadership level after 40 years. The Prime Minister underscored the need to further strengthen the cooperation between the two countries in socioeconomic, educational, agricultural, energy and cultural fields.

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad was quite sanguine about the excellent friendship and cooperation between the two countries. These bonds have been reinforced, from time to time, by exchange of high level visits and interaction between the leaders of the two countries. There is ample scope and need to expand trade with Russia. Presently, Bangladesh trade with Russia stands at \$700 million. Russia could also become an important source of FDI for us. Since the infusion of new vitality into the bilateral relations in 2009, Russia has embarked on helping Bangladesh build the long-talked about Nuclear Power Plant in Rooppur, a major priority

project. They are also providing the Bangladesh defence Services with much needed supplies of modern equipments.

At the final part of his speech, Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad stressed that there is considerable potential for further deepening and expanding such cooperation in various fields. Existing cooperation in gas and oil exploration, public health, education could easily be further expanded. Bangladesh could tap the Russian market for increasing its exports of garments and other products considerably. With some efforts it could also find considerable opportunity for exporting of manpower to Russia. There is also scope for more coordination of Bangladesh's positions on important international issues of mutual interest and greater cooperation in various international forums. Greater interaction among government departments, businesses, think tanks, and academia as well as other people to people exchanges would be of great importance if the country wants to reap the full benefits of the warm friendly relations that so happily exists between the two countries.